

**CAREER BRIEF #1:**  
***Guidelines for Being an Effective Committee Member***

**Benefits of Committees to Organizations**

Committees can be extremely effective ways to organize projects. They allow us to tap into the many diverse skills and talents of employees, producing a result superior to what any one individual would be capable. Committees are particularly useful when a complex problem needs to be solved and innovation and creativity are required. Using a group process also creates an investment in the outcome and a sense of ownership of the project by committee members. People are committed to what they have created.

**Benefits of Committees to Committee Members**

Committees provide opportunities for individuals to develop knowledge and skills in areas to which they may not normally be exposed. They also provide a chance for staff to get to know employees in other parts of the organization. Thus, serving on committees can be very helpful in advancing in your career, as well as giving you a chance to have a significant impact on your organization.

**To Be An Effective Committee Member:**

- *Approach your appointment to a committee with a positive attitude.* Remember that you were selected for this assignment because your skills and talents were viewed as being valuable to the project.
- *Be familiar with the purpose of the committee.* If the committee goals are not clear to you, ask for clarification. The chances are if you do not understand the committee's purpose, other members are equally confused. A clear statement of purpose is essential for committees to be productive.
- *Be clear about the fact that you represent more than just yourself on a committee.* Committee members are generally selected to represent some segment of the organization (e.g., a particular unit or agency, a Division, a job classification, etc.) Once you know what group you represent, find ways to get input from others in the group you represent.
- *Attend meetings regularly and be on time.* One of the biggest frustrations for committee leaders is poor attendance. It is up to each member to be responsible for showing up for meetings and for being on time. This is essential if the committee is to be successful.
- *If you are unable to attend a meeting, find out what is expected.* Who should you notify that you will be absent? Should you send a substitute? How can you submit any assignments that are due that meeting? How can you make arrangements to get minutes or an update on what happened at the meeting you missed?

- *Willingly volunteer to complete assignments between meetings.* It is usually impossible to complete all of the work a committee needs to do during the time allotted for meetings. Therefore, members are frequently required to complete assignments between meetings. All members should be prepared to share in taking on these assignments.
- *Be responsible in meeting deadlines for assignments accepted.* Missed deadlines present a major problem for committees. It slows down the process and creates irritation among the members who do submit their assignments on time. You can avoid this problem by being realistic about deadlines to which you agree, and then following through as promised.
- *Pair up with someone who has a skill you would like to develop.* Sometimes committees need to form sub-groups to complete various tasks. Use this opportunity to work with other members from whom you can learn. Likewise, be willing to share your particular expertise with others.
- *Volunteer for roles you do not normally take.* There are various roles that need to be filled on committees (leader, timekeeper, scribe, etc.). Consider volunteering for a role that will be a stretch for you. This is a good way to develop new skills.
- *Speak up and give your thoughtful opinions about matters being discussed.* You have been asked to serve on a committee because your input is valued. This is not the time to hang back. Speak up and be heard.
- *Be respectful when other committee members are speaking.* One of the benefits of committees is the ability to bring together the collective thinking of a diverse group of people. For this to be effective, all members must have an equal voice.

### **A Final Thought**

The success of a committee is highly dependent upon the full participation of its members. Committee work can be very demanding, but the potential rewards are numerous.

*Opportunity is missed by most people  
because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.*

**--Thomas A. Edison**

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